

EDITORIAL COMMENT



THE NAVY BILL

THE Navy Bill, of which a copy is given in this number, is considered to be as fair a measure as can be expected at this time. We are informed upon good authority that Mrs. Kinney, the superintendent of the Army Nurse Corps, was consulted by the navy officials who framed the bill, and that her suggestions were acted upon in regard to a number of important points. We also know that much very strong social and political influence has been brought to bear upon the bill, and if it become a law, it will be because of a force broadly distributed, and not by the influence of any one person or organization.

We shall hope to see proper provision made by the government for the representation of the Army Nurse Corps at the International Congress of Nurses to be held in Berlin in 1904. The medical department of the army is usually officially represented at great medical congresses, and it would seem only fitting that the Nurse Corps should be given dignified recognition upon the same lines. The Nurse Corps is now a permanent organization, and each year an effort should be made to secure official recognition of the corps as one of the professional departments of the government.

THE LAW OF REGISTRATION IN NEW YORK STATE

WE have been asked to give in these pages an explanation of the details of the working of the law of registration under the supervision of the Regents upon the lines proposed in the *New York* bill.

As a preliminary we will say that the University of the State of New York is not a university in the commonly accepted sense of the term, but is practically the Board of Education of the State, having its headquarters at the Capitol in Albany.

It is composed of nineteen elective Regents, supposed to be outside the pale of politics, with the Governor, Lieutenant-Governor, Secretary of State, and Superintendent of Public Instruction. The Regents are elected by the Legislature and serve for life without salary.

The University does not make the laws governing education, but executes them after they are made; its function is executive, and one of its most important duties is to see that proper standards are maintained, both for admission and for graduation in the various educational institutions under its care, comprising universities, high schools, and all other educational institutions above the primary grade.

Laws have already been passed and are in operation which regulate the education of physicians, dentists, veterinary surgeons, and public accountants. A system of registration is maintained in the State of the members of these four professions, the working machinery being practically the same for each, and the registration of nurses will add one more profession to the list already under the supervision of the University.

Taking the medical profession as the example, the registration of nurses when secured will be conducted practically as follows:

The New York State Nurses' Association will send to the Regents the names of ten of its members, from which ten names the Regents will select an Examining Board of five. This Examining Board will be required to organize and to agree upon the subjects for examination, dividing the subjects between the examiners. These examiners will then make up their questions, which will be sent sealed to the University. The examinations, which may be held simultaneously in New York, Albany, Syracuse, and Buffalo, will be conducted by officers in the employ of the University, who are not in any way connected with the New York State Nurses' Association. Each examination paper will be signed by a figure or symbol, instead of the applicant's name, sealed, and according to the subjects sent to the nurses who compose the Examining Board, who will mark the papers and return them to the University. Accordinging to the marking of these papers the applicant is registered and granted a license, or rejected.

The members of the Examining Board will not know the names of the nurses whom they are examining.

A record will be kept at the University of those nurses who are legally registered, and they will also be required to file their license to practise with the County Clerk, thus making it always possible to quickly ascertain whether or not a nurse is legally qualified and entitled to use the letters R. N.

NURSES IN THE FIELD

ONE point which many intelligent people fail to grasp in connection with the subject of State registration is that nurses already in the field in New York State will not be required to pass this examination, and that no woman, whether a graduate or not, will be prevented at any time from doing a nurse's work. Registration, in the beginning, will simply create a distinction between the nurses who have received a certain amount of education and those who have not had the same experience or advantages.

Nurses who are already graduates of training-schools whose standards are approved by the Regents may make application for a certificate or license, upon receipt of which they shall be permitted to use the title R. N., and have their names recorded in the County Clerk's office.

In granting these certificates the Regents will be advised by the Examining Board of Nurses, a point which serves to emphasize the fact that one of the most important features of this whole question is that while the working machinery of the law will be exerted by the Regents of the University, the nurses themselves, as represented by their Board of Examiners, will have a voice in fixing the standards for nursing education.

THE MORAL QUESTION

"A MEMBER of a Training-School Committee," in a letter in the present issue, raises the question as to what the nursing profession proposes to do with the unworthy graduates, of whom, the writer states, every training-school has a number.

It is hoped that with State registration at least a partial means of what we will call moral control will be possible.

The medical qualifications for registration require that a man shall be of good moral character, and yet it is a perfectly recognized fact that neither the

medical profession, nor any of the other professions, have yet devised a means by which members can always be excluded who fail to conform to the highest moral standards.

The bills framed by the "New York State Nurses' Association" and the "Illinois State Nurses' Association" include the clause that among other requirements "a woman must be of good moral character;" and provision is made in both bills by which a certificate may be revoked for sufficient cause, etc.

Whether or not the nursing profession will be able to accomplish what the other professions have failed to secure is a question that time only can prove.

The nursing profession is acutely conscious of the defects of the present methods of training and of the shortcomings of many of the women in its ranks, but it feels that until it has a voice in the making of its own standards, until it has a right to determine who shall be admitted to its ranks, it is hardly just and hardly fair for it to be held responsible for all of the uneducated and immoral women whom the State and society permit to call themselves trained nurses.

We detect in this letter a tone of sarcasm that seems to us uncalled for, in view of the fact that trained nursing to-day is very largely what laymen (and by laymen we mean members of boards and physicians) have made it.

Even now the woman who holds the position of superintendent of a training-school is, in very few instances, permitted to use her judgment when it comes to a question of retaining or rejecting what she considers to be an undesirable pupil. Experience trains a superintendent's perceptions to such a degree that frequently, without being able to make charges based upon facts which shall be satisfactory to a training-school board, she is absolutely certain that one or two pupils in her school are not the right kind of women.

As the writer of this letter has said, they may have been endorsed in the highest terms by unquestionably responsible people, they perform their manual duties skilfully, they are exceptionally bright in class, they are popular both with patients and physicians, and yet there is a certain something about them that marks them as being morally unfit, and the Training-School Committee as well as the law and alumnae associations can listen only to charges based upon facts.

Where such a nurse has gone out into the world to "disgrace her diploma" we question whether in one single instance her moral unfitness has passed unrecognized by her superintendent.

We have passed the stage where nursing is to be looked upon as a religious calling. The public must learn that nursing is a profession, and that the women who enter this profession represent the average degree of womanliness, intelligence, and morality of the different classes of society from which they are drawn. When the public recognizes this fact nurses will not be so severely criticised or discriminated against, as we feel is done by the writer of the letter referred to. It is not an altogether unusual thing for a nurse to be called upon to care for a *lady* suffering from the "gin" habit or the "morphia" habit, and infidelities in domestic life are not infrequently recognized by her in the discharge of her professional duties.

We do not excuse the faults or the shortcomings of the women of our own profession, but we ask for them fair play, more especially from that great body of women to whom they are indebted for the existence of their profession, and

who have had opportunity to know the difficulties of keeping the ranks filled with perfect women.

PROVISION FOR AGED NURSES

THE subject of provision for trained nurses in their old age is another question which is raised by one of our correspondents in the present number.

Here again we are opposed to treating nurses as a distinct class, and as requiring greater consideration from the public than other bodies of working people. In so far as nurses can provide for each other either in old age or sickness, it seems perfectly legitimate that it should be done. Actors and authors make provision for their own members, as do other professions, and we think it will naturally follow with closer organization that provision for aged nurses will be made by the members of their own profession, and it is not too soon to begin to consider some measures leading in this direction.

If beds are to be endowed in hospitals for the use of nurses, they should be endowed by nurses; and if homes are to be established or provision made for the care of aged nurses, it must be by nurses, and not in any way by an appeal to the general public.

After all, there are very few women in the profession who have not some home ties or connections, and there are many occupations less arduous than nursing which a woman may follow, earning at least a partial livelihood, after she has passed the years when active nursing work is possible, and the fact that she is willing to perform such work as she is able to do, instead of becoming dependent upon anyone in her declining years, should not lessen the respect with which she is regarded by the more fortunate members of her profession.

BILLS BEFORE THE LEGISLATURE

The North Carolina Nurses' Association is to be congratulated upon having been the first to report a bill before the Legislature. A brief account of the situation is given in the "Official Department," which shows that although the bill passed the House successfully, it was meeting with opposition from proprietors of private sanatoria and one hospital, which were evidently unwilling or unable to give to their pupils that minimum amount of education or "training" that the State should decide to be necessary.

In *Illinois* the situation is equally interesting. We quote from a letter received from the president, Mrs. Hutchinson, which gives the situation in a nutshell:

"Our bill is before the General Assembly. Whether or not it ever leaves that august presence is a question, but the unity that has come as a result of the organization among the nurses is worth having worked for.

"We prepared our original bill, which you have printed, the State Board of Health presented a second bill, and now we, in conjunction with the State Board of Health, have drawn up a compromise bill which in some respects is better than either of the other two. While we do not get a separate board (the granting of separate boards being entirely against the custom of this Legislature), we get an 'Examining Committee for Registration of Nurses of the State Board of Health,' to consist of three nurses and the secretary of the State Board of Health. These nurses are to be appointed from recommendations made by the Illinois State Association of Graduate Nurses, and one of the three is to hold

the office of assistant to the secretary of the State Board of Health. She is to have an office in Chicago and to be paid a salary of twelve hundred dollars a year and expenses (travelling, etc.). An important provision in this bill is that this committee shall investigate training-schools and see that the work they are doing comes up to the required standard. I shall send you a copy of this bill as soon as I get one. I fully believe we will have State registration here before June 1. Our bill does not reserve the right to use 'trained' or 'graduate,' as that interferes with 'vested rights' and would not pass, but we do reserve the right to use 'registered' and 'licensed.'

Mrs. Hutchinson also reports an interesting quarterly meeting held on February 9, with seventy-five members present.

In *New York*, since the January meeting, the legislative committee of the New York State Nurses' Association has been exceedingly active. Much pressure was brought to bear upon the committee by the secretary of the Board of Regents of the University to strike out the words "general" and "State hospitals" in the first section of the bill, it being his opinion that the chances of passing the bill would be much greater if this concession was made before the bill was introduced, and this the committee decided to do after very careful consideration and able advice.

The bill as it is to be presented is given in full in the official department, and it will be seen that the educational qualifications are safeguarded by the phrase "as maintaining in this and other respects proper standards, all of which shall be determined by the Regents of the University of the State of New York."

It is perfectly understood that the opposition to the New York bill will be very great, and it comes from two recognized sources. New York State has an unlimited number of small private hospitals and sanatoria that are commercially opposed to the bill, and a commercial opposition to an educational measure usually, at first, carries much political influence. Eventually, when the opposition has served to educate the public, the *right* wins. The other source of opposition comes from the *minority* of the New York State Nurses' Association, the "rule or ruin" element that almost every large organization has to contend with, and which often serves as a stimulus to more active work on the part of the majority.

On February 16 a bill was introduced to the Assembly by Mr. Nye, of Schuyler County, brother of Miss Sylveen Nye, of Buffalo, asking for the registration of nurses under the *Secretary of State*. The only qualification called for, as we interpret the bill, is a sworn statement from the individual that he or she is *entitled* to registration, and the privilege seems to be granted equally to nurses who have not been given a diploma. This measure calls for no educational standards, is not safeguarded by supervision of the Regents of the University, and while it might serve the purpose of an entering-wedge, from the standpoint of educational advancement it asks for nothing and its passage would mean nothing to the profession.

Probably before this number of the JOURNAL is ready for circulation the fate of these bills in all three States will be decided. We can only repeat what we have said in these pages before, that even with *failure* we shall have made great progress because of the educational influence of agitation.

As we go to press *New Jersey* reports a bill before the House. *Virginia* nurses have not reported, but we know they are not idle. We offer our congratulations in advance to the first State to report a bill "*passed*."

THE New York State Nurses' Association at the January meeting admitted to membership a number of individuals and organizations, making its constituency seven hundred and fifty members. With the applications now in the hands of the secretary, to be approved at the meeting in April, the number will run up to more than twelve hundred—not a bad record in two years. Every step taken by the society has been open to the light of day. The bill presented has been published in nursing journals and the daily press and has been discussed in two open meetings, where every nurse who has had interest enough to be present has had an opportunity to express her views.

